



whitchurch town council

ABRIDGED ANNUAL REPORT | CIVIC YEAR 2024-2025

Web: whitchurchtowncouncil.gov.uk | Social: @wtcwhitchurch | Email: info@whitchurchcouncil.uk

Mayor and Chairman 2024/2025

Councillor Andy Hall

Members as at May 2025 (Pre-Election)

NORTH WARD

Chez Doyle **Cy/HW/A**
Adele Jackson **HW/P/PI**
Matt Phipps **A/Cy/O/PI**
Giles Sullivan **Cy/H/P**
Keith Robinson **co-opt 2/25**

SOUTH WARD

Gregory Ebbs **O**
Andy Hall **O/PI**
Angie Hotchkiss **P**
Cathy Purt **A/HW//PI**
Mike Ridgway **A/H**

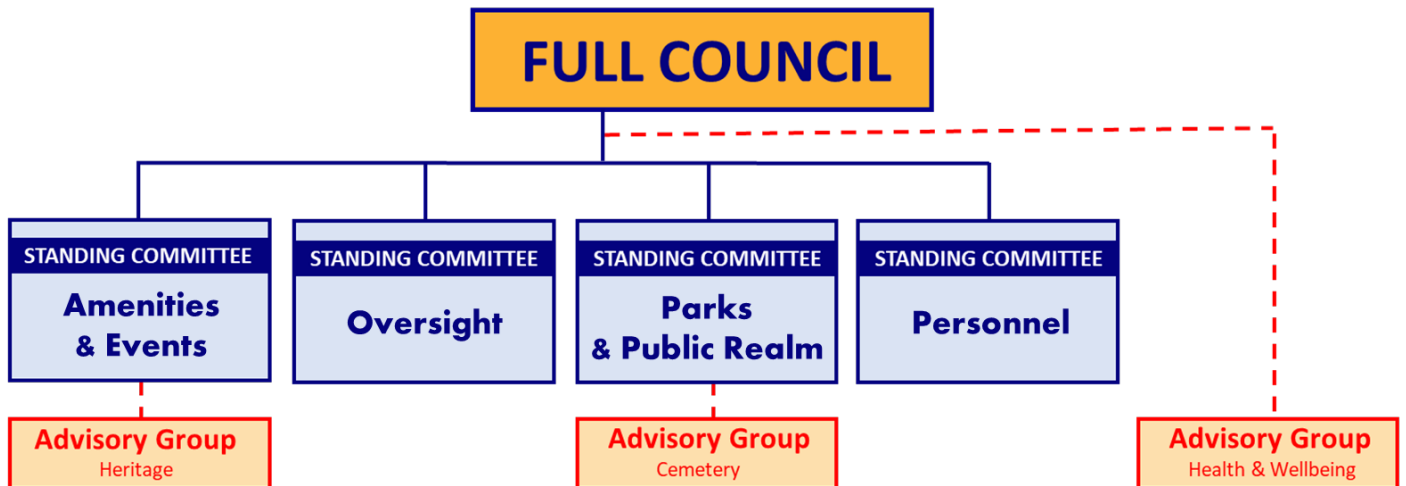
WEST WARD

Jayne De-Wyrall **P**
Anthony Gilmore **A/H**
Rose Hall **HW/O/PI**
Pete Lea **Cy/H/P**
John Morris **Cy/H/O**

COMMITTEES: A – Amenities & Events; O – Oversight; P – Parks & Public Realm; PI – Personnel

ADVISORY GROUPS: Cy – Cemetery; HW – Health & Wellbeing; H - Heritage

Governance: Committee Structure 2024/25



The Council appoints Standing Committees and their membership at the Annual Council Meeting, held each May. Committee membership is based on the specific needs of each Committee and membership takes into consideration the skillsets of individual Councillors. The Council delegates appropriate matters for scrutiny and debate to these Committees and define these in the current version of its Standing Orders, Financial Regulations and Scheme of Delegation. Committee and Advisory Group Membership is given above.

Proper Officer & Responsible Financial Officer

Mike McDonald, MA, FSLCC, CiLCA, FCMI, FRSA, MInstF, CiPFA

STAFF TEAM AT MAY 2025:

Business Manager: Linda Field

Administration: Jane Down, Pauline Jones

Facilities Team: Lawrence Bebbington, Michael Bloore, Morris Clive (Facilities Manager); Stephen Garrett; David Shepherd, David Whitehead

Mayor's Overview – 2024/2025

Cllr Andy Hall

Welcome to our Annual Report for the 2024/25 Civic Year – yet another very busy year! As I finish my third year in office as Mayor and Chairman of Whitchurch Town Council (unprecedented in recent years); I can only reflect on how much we have achieved in such a short period of time.

In 2021, our current administration inherited a failing council, in what could only be described as in “special measures”, and have since transformed it into a high-level progressive, confident and forward-thinking Council respected across the county and beyond – indeed, fit for the future!

My personal thanks go to our Proper Officer, Mike McDonald for working so hard alongside me and my fellow councillors to enable this transformation to take place sharing a clear vision for our town's future.

This year we have seen the much-awaited opening of the new Clayton Medical Centre, the Whitchurch Swimming Centre & the temporary Whitchurch Town Hall & Community Hub, representing continued inward investment in our growing town. We continue to work closely with our local partners and stakeholders to keep our town vibrant and an awesome place to live, work & play!

This year, we upgraded to Silver Membership status with official tourism partner “Visit Shropshire” to continue to share our successes and promote the town and latest figures suggest that our town continues to ‘hold its own’ in the face of economic certainty too ...

VISIT SHROPSHIRE – WHITCHURCH HIGHLIGHTS (MARCH 2025 FOOTFALL AND ECONOMIC REPORT)

STRONG GROWTH IN FOOTFALL

- WHITCHURCH TOWN CENTRE ENJOYED A **3.7% INCREASE** IN VISITORS COMPARED TO FEBRUARY 2025, SHOWING STRONG MOMENTUM INTO SPRING.
- COMPARED TO MARCH 2024, **FOOTFALL HAS GROWN BY 2.3%**, HIGHLIGHTING STEADY YEAR-ON-YEAR PROGRESS.

KEY STREET SUCCESS

- GREEN END REMAINS THE VIBRANT HEART OF THE TOWN CENTRE, ATTRACTING THE HIGHEST NUMBER OF VISITS WITH **OVER 50,000** IN MARCH 2025.
- IT REPRESENTS OVER A QUARTER (27.3%) OF ALL TOWN CENTRE VISITS, DEMONSTRATING ITS CONTINUED IMPORTANCE AS A MAJOR DRAW FOR VISITORS.

STABLE VISITOR ENGAGEMENT

VISITORS ARE SPENDING **A HEALTHY AVERAGE OF 38 MINUTES** IN THE TOWN CENTRE — A STRONG SIGN OF SUSTAINED INTEREST AND ENGAGEMENT.

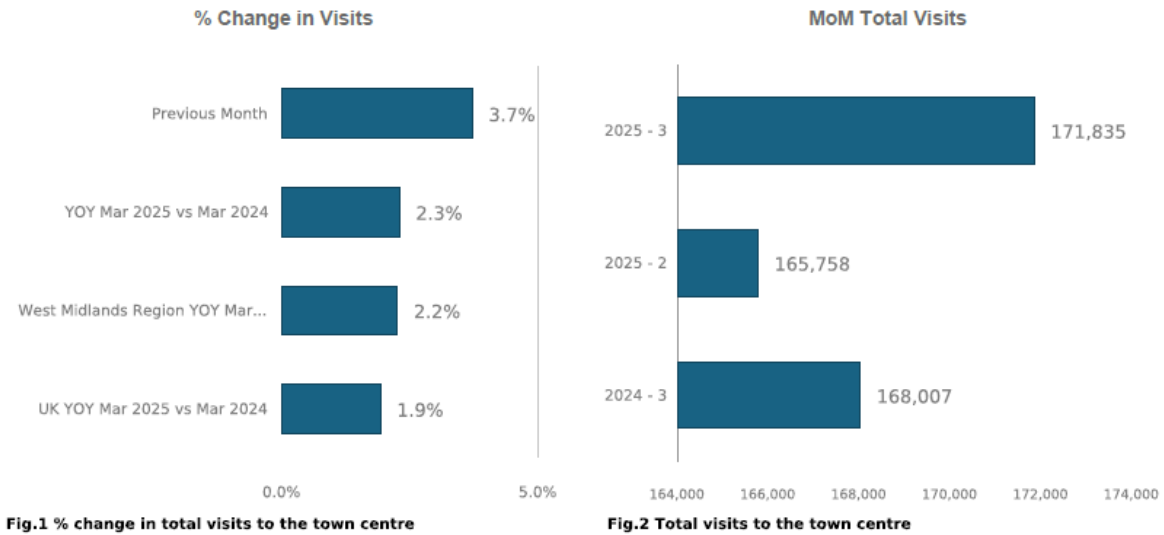
ENCOURAGINGLY **15.2%** OF VISITORS STAYED FOR 60–90 MINUTES

ATTRACTING VISITORS FROM NEAR AND FAR

- NEARLY HALF (48.97%) OF VISITORS CAME FROM WITHIN A 3-MILE RADIUS, CONFIRMING WHITCHURCH'S STRONG LOCAL LOYALTY.
- AT THE SAME TIME, THE TOWN CONTINUES TO ATTRACT NEW AUDIENCES FROM FURTHER AFIELD, BUILDING A WIDER VISITOR BASE.

STRONG HIGH-SPEND POTENTIAL

- **22% OF VISITORS WERE IDENTIFIED AS HAVING HIGH SPENDING POTENTIAL**, PROVIDING A STRONG OPPORTUNITY FOR LOCAL BUSINESSES TO BENEFIT.



This is reinforced by empirical evidence from local traders in the town. One business, new to our town centre, recently said:

“In a time where I’m seeing stories about ‘the high street’s dead’ we have been so busy we needed to upgrade [sic. premises] ... So thank you Whitchurch a lot of you might not realise this, but there’s not many places left like our little town and from a business standpoint, I believe if you are willing to put the work in it’s an amazing place to be ... You have been able to maintain your identity while growing as a wonderful little market town.”

To support this growth we have continued to engage locally, regionally and nationally – with incredible ongoing help from Anna Turner, HM Lord Lieutenant of Shropshire, the High Sheriff of Shropshire (in 2024/25 Brian Welti JP) and the MP for North Shropshire, Helen Morgan.



L-R: Andy Hall, Mayor of Whitchurch; Helen Morgan MP; Anna Turner, HM Lord Lieutenant of Shropshire; Brian Welti, High Sheriff of Shropshire at the opening of our temporary premises on Station Road, February 2025

Our local community groups continue to thrive too – and we endeavour to support as many as possible throughout the year through our “Small Community Grant” Programme (covered later in this Report).

Elsewhere, sadly there is no significant update on the status of the Shropshire Council owned Civic Centre – though we have continued to fully participate as a partner in the Working Group established to consider and propose options to the building owner and Corporate Landlord for consideration. Integral to this was the announcement of a £4M allocation for repairs / building works (match-funding), to be informed by public consultation. We are fortunate, however, to have secured a temporary home in the interim, which has provided some sanctuary for several community groups who were left without a venue space following the abrupt closure of the Civic Centre in September 2023. We continue to be grateful for the generosity of the Chase family for their support in the provision and refurbishment of the newly named “Whitchurch Town Hall & Community Hub” (formerly the Old Police Station, Station Road).

This year we’re also looking forward to a calendar full of community events starting with the return of a revitalised food festival on 24th May 2025. This was one of the final things I wanted to achieve as your mayor... it’s going to be amazing!

In a weeks’ time I will be handing over the Mayoral ‘reigns’ to your next Mayor whom I’m sure will enjoy the same support as I have. It has been beyond a privilege to represent our town for the past few years and a boyhood dream come true.

I intend to remain serving as a Whitchurch Town Councillor and, the good news is, we now have two Town Councillors' who are also Shropshire Councillors (elected May 2025), including myself. This “twin-hatted” situation enables us to be the conduit between town & county, which has been missing for some time. All our councillors are committed to prioritising & protecting local services. Whether that’s investing in keeping Whitchurch tidy, making our parks and green spaces the best in Shropshire, or stepping up to fill the space left by the County Council as it goes through financial turbulence – we’re on your side ... [#whitchurchstrongertogether!](#)

Committee Report: Amenities & Events

CLlr Matt Phipps, Committee Chair

Key Areas of Responsibility: Strategic development of WTC Estates, Heritage & the Heritage Centre, Markets, Marketing & PR, Economic Wellbeing, Events, Tourism, and our Youth Services.

The year started as the old ended, a closed Civic Centre with a team in need of suitable office and meeting space and Community Groups displaced through the closure of the building.

However these issues were overcome by the temporary lease of the old Police station, on Station Road, thanks to the support of Chase Enterprises who provided the building and the majority of works to enable occupation. The building was officially opened on the 21st February 2025 by Anna Turner, HM Lord Lieutenant of Shropshire, Brian Welti JP, High Sheriff of Shropshire, Helen Morgan, MP for North Shropshire, and our very own Andy Hall, Mayor of Whitchurch.

This building has helped to accommodate many of the regular Civic users, who found themselves without facilities by Shropshire Council's sudden closure in September 2023. From an events perspective, last year's Party in the Park was a great success, as was a slightly cold, wet, and blustery Christmas Lights Switch-on.



This year's events start as we mean to go on, with the "all new" Food & Drink Festival on the 24th of May, followed by a 'Late Summer' Party in the Park in August – alongside our 'usual' events, including the weekly Market, which continues despite the uncertainty surrounding the Civic Centre building and remains supported by the public and our traders.

I would like to thank the people of Whitchurch for their support of our events, and to all our staff that work together to keep everything running smoothly.

Committee Report: Oversight

Cllr Rose Hall, Deputy Mayor & Committee Chair

Key Areas of Responsibility: Scrutiny and oversight of financial and governance matters, policy development and community support through financial initiatives

2024 and 2025 have continued to be challenging at times, however Whitchurch Town Council and our staff team are now settled in the new temporary headquarters giving stability to both staff and our townsfolk who have now got a base to visit, and our smaller community groups have a place to hire suitable rooms.

This year, the Oversight Committee has ensured that financial matters were dealt with to the high standard, which is expected. We have continued to develop significant improvements from the Council's Internal and External Audit processes.

Our processes are more robust after our Proper Officer gained an Internal Audit qualification, PIALC. Governance reviews were undertaken where necessary, where practices and policies were reviewed, developed, and recommended to ensure that the Town Council is effective, efficient and value for money.

Our profile in the Town continues to be positive and we continue to work alongside partners, to forge new collaborative partnerships, which undoubtedly has contributed to significant improvements in how people have perceived the work of the Town Council. The Committee were also pleased to deliver the Town Council's Small Community Grants Programme on behalf of the Full Council, ensuring that many of the Town's beloved charitable organisations were able to flourish, develop and deliver appropriate services for public benefit.

Committee Report: Parks & Public Realm

Cllr Adele Jackson, Committee Chair

Key Areas of Responsibility: Strategic development of Open Spaces, Public Facilities, Clocks, Allotments, Community Safety, Streetlighting, CCTV and Burial Facilities.

It has been a successful and productive year for the Parks and Public Realm Committee. While some ongoing challenges have caused frustration, the overall picture is extremely positive, particularly in relation to the development of our Parks Team and the implementation of the "*Back to Basics*" programme in partnership with consultant Gary Farmer, which involved significant investment in our Parks & Public Realm Team and their equipment / facilities.

This initiative has provided us with a structured, year-round schedule to maintain our parks to the high standard seen in summer 2024. The introduction of new tiered planters has also proven effective, offering greater visual impact while remaining easy to manage.

Key Initiatives and Updates:

- **Dog Poo Bag Trial**
The dog poo bag initiative, trialled in Jubilee Park, has been a success. Bins have been installed, and we hope to extend the scheme to other areas across the town. Unfortunately, there have been some issues with theft, but we are actively exploring ways to address this.
- **Town Signage Review**
Work on reviewing the town signage will begin at the start of the new civic year. Progress has been delayed due to difficulties in coordinating with local groups, but we are committed to prioritising this moving forward.
- **Britain in Bloom**
Our application for Britain in Bloom was submitted in February. Councillors De-Wyrall and Hotchkiss have been instrumental in preparations, and we are now excitedly awaiting the assessor's visit.

- **Biodiversity-Aligned Projects**

Potential sites for biodiversity planting have been identified, including the cemetery and Jubilee Park. These areas will be planted with bee- and bird-friendly wildflower mixes in support of the council's biodiversity goals.

- **Anti-Social Driving and Behaviour**

A request has been submitted to the Policing Panel to address three key priorities: dangerous driving, anti-social behaviour, and drug-related issues. Following concerns raised by members of the public, anti-social parking will also be included in discussions.

- **Community Support and Volunteering**

We extend our sincere thanks to *We Are Whitchurch* for their continued support, especially with the composting initiative and the maintenance of Harry Richard's Garden. These projects not only enhance the town's appearance but also support Whitchurch Town Council's climate change and biodiversity commitments. All of this work has been carried out by dedicated volunteers and is now actively in use, which is fantastic.

- **Drainage in Jubilee Park**

The persistent flooding issues in the children's play area and skate park are finally being addressed. A contractor has been appointed, and drainage works are scheduled to begin in the early Summer 2025. This will pave the way for further improvements, including new surfacing and the addition of inclusive play equipment in the Play Area – an exciting development for our community.



We are incredibly grateful to all our partners, volunteers, staff team and community members – especially *We Are Whitchurch* – for their hard work and dedication in helping us make Whitchurch a beautiful and welcoming place for everyone.

Committee Report: Personnel

Cllr Rose Hall, Deputy Mayor & Committee Chair

Key Areas of Responsibility: Strategic management and operational oversight of our staff team and volunteers.

The Personnel Committee is pleased to report a stable employment year despite on-going 'challenges' with our physical environment - everyone has stepped up and settled into our new, temporary offices, to ensure that as many public services as possible are maintained. Some staff turnover has allowed us to refresh structures through normal 'management' review; this has ensured a 'value for money' approach to the delivery of our services.

This performance applies throughout each discipline – from Administration / Reception coping with the new building and ways of working, to the Facilities Teams (in both our Building/s and within the Parks & Public Realm), where we continue to hear great things about their ongoing efforts. The resilience of everyone on our staff team is appreciated.

Thanks to this stability, the Committee has not had the need to intervene, though has maintained oversight through other lines of communication.

We remain adaptable and reactive to need - listening to our community, and ensuring we serve those needs as best as we can.

Advisory Group Report: Health & Wellbeing

Cllr Cathy Purt, Advisory Group Chair

Key Areas of Responsibility: Carry out research and other initiatives, engaging with the wider local Health & Social Care sector on behalf of, and reporting to, Full Council.

The Health and Wellbeing Advisory Group has continued to work with Shropshire Council's public health team to ensure that the issues highlighted in the Whitchurch joint strategic needs assessment relating to health are being developed with appropriate solutions. We have encouraged the development of Whitchurch mental health services, especially for young people and have welcomed the mental health bus service – which has attended, alongside the wider team, Friday Markets to provide an information and signposting service for residents.

The Group has also worked with local third sector organisations and is delighted that help is available across a range of needs for residents of Whitchurch. The Group also undertakes engagement as a member of the Whitchurch Medical Centre Patient Participation Group on behalf of the Town Council.

Supporting the Voluntary Sector

Organisations supported during the 2024/25 Civic Year

BizEd CiC	Bradbury Care Centre
Little Bears Daycare	NS Wheelers
Poetry Whitchurch	Queensway Playing Fields Association
Whitchurch Amateur Operatic & Dramatic Society	Whitchurch Archers
Whitchurch Band	Whitchurch English Country Music Festival
Whitchurch Singers	Whitchurch Town Twinning
Whitchurch Walkers	Whitchurch Waterways Trust
Wingate Special Children's Trust	

We recognise that Whitchurch is particularly lucky to benefit from more than its fair share vibrant community groups and passionate volunteers, who each contribute to local life - helping people who need additional support. Our Small Community Grants Programme, in turn, is designed to provide financial and other assistance to these groups to enable them to deliver a wide range of community projects.

This is in addition to the support given to Blackberry Fair CIC (£5,000, plus the use of resources, to enable effective event management, and a Heritage Centre Unit throughout the year, towards the annual Blackberry Fair) and the work of the Heritage Centre Volunteers (leased Heritage Centre at peppercorn rent, an Annual Allocation of £5,000 plus payment of the majority of running costs (c £18,000).

Feedback from some award recipients:

"Thanks to the grant of £1000 from Whitchurch Town Council, we were able to hire the rugby club for the weekend of the English Country Music Festival without risk of loss to our personal funds. The rugby club will not only be a major venue for music sessions but will also be the camp site for those bringing camper vans and tents.

We currently have over 110 musicians, many leaders in their field, coming to the town and, based upon £50 per person per day, that amounts to a £15000 boost to the local economy." **English Country Music Festival**

"The continued support of Whitchurch Town Council is hugely important us. We receive no government funding and rely on the local community to help us deliver our fundraising target. This year's grant will go towards the delivery of one-to-one disability fitness sessions for our Whitchurch clients. These sessions are tailored to the individual and involve one of or a combination of gymnastic exercise, rebound therapy and time on the assisted bike. Physical benefits include an increase in flexibility, strength, mobility and better-quality sleep." **Wingate Special Children's Trust**

"We needed a venue to meet, and we applied for the grant to help pay for venue hire. This has allowed the group to continue to meet and rehearse giving the group the confidence to sing in public and at other venues for groups. The public and people attending the groups have been with very forthcoming with their praise saying how much they enjoyed our singing and how much happier they felt." **Whitchurch Singers**

"We are over the moon with the level of support we have received from the community this year and have taken this opportunity to overhaul our outside space and make it safer and allow the children to use it in all weathers. This has been a long-term goal that we have been wanting for many years but have been unable to think about due to finances however due to the overwhelming support, we should be commencing the work in June, and this will be utilised by the children for many years to come. We would like to again thank everyone who has chosen to support us this year. We appreciate each and every donation and grant, no matter how big or small, and use them to invest back into the community and the children." **Little Bears Daycare**

"(With the support of the grant from Whitchurch Town Council) we have been able to offer 2 beginners' courses and 2 "Have a go" sessions - there are more planned. These have attracted many new members to the Archery Club, increasing membership from 20 to 32 persons." **Whitchurch Archers**

*"The Canal Festival is a fun celebration of Whitchurch's canal heritage, attracting people of all ages from the local community and further afield. Last year Whitchurch Waterway Trust received a grant of £500 from Whitchurch Town Council which allowed us to pay the costs of our musicians and performers. The 2025 festival is going to be bigger and better than ever, so don't miss it! (Sat 30th & Sun 31st August)." **Whitchurch Waterways Trust***

Whitchurch Museum & Heritage Centre Annual Report

Dr Judith Hoyle, Curator

Whitchurch Museum is housed within Whitchurch Heritage Centre, 12 St Mary's Street, and is operated solely by dedicated volunteers. It is run by the charity, Whitchurch Museum & Archives, who own and maintain the museum collection of over 6,000 items. The charity's aim is to advance the education of the public in the history and heritage of Whitchurch, Shropshire and its surrounding area.

To accomplish this aim the museum is operated to Arts Council national Accreditation standards and displays the history and heritage of Whitchurch and its environs. The volunteers carry out research projects relevant to these aims, producing booklets, leaflets and internet material from their findings. In addition they collect and maintain a fully catalogued historical archive of relevant artefacts.

Activities during the Civic Year 2024 to 2025:

- A survey by the Museums Association indicated that the economic impact of visitors to the museum on the local economy was approximately £30,000.
- The last year has been very successful with continued growth in visitor numbers. The museum welcomed 1,982 visitors, an increase of approximately 17% on the previous year.
- Volunteers worked over 6000 hours, both on site, giving talks, attending courses and working remotely from home. If an average working week of 35 hours is assumed, then these figures equate to a full time equivalent of 3.25 members of staff.
- The museum is open to the public on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 11:00 to 16:00 and in addition from 10:00 until 13:00 on the first Saturday of every month.

- The Heritage Centre also opened outside these hours for special events including an evening in May for a Road Stories writing workshop, an evening in June for Whitchurch Brownies to research their local history badge and for Blackberry Fair in October.
- The Heritage Centre played host to Finds Liaison Officers from the Midlands and Northwest twice during the year. They organised appointments for people who had found objects, mainly through metal detecting, identified them and recorded their finds on the national database. This will now become an annual event at the museum in December.
- In July we welcomed a 6th former from SJT for a work experience placement.
- School groups and organisations continue to visit the museum including Little Bears Daycare and young people from Pettypool Vocational College near Northwich.
- A group of staff and volunteers from Nantwich Museum visited for advice regarding accession methods (Modes) and display techniques. Subsequent correspondence indicated a successful trip.
- Volunteers continue to network and support local groups. They are currently in partnership with Road Stories (Rural Art Hub), Penley Polish Heritage Project and Malpas VE 80 'The Homecoming'
- In October Lincoln Conservation visited to take 3D photographs of items identified for a handling collection
- Early in 2025 artefacts viewed and volunteers interviewed for a podcast on WW2 Prees Heath
- Talks were given by volunteers to U3A and Trefoil Guild Shropshire conference
- September's Heritage Open Days were very successful and attracted nearly 1000 visitors to the ten sites. Dodington old chapel was a new addition to the programme.

This year, more than 200 new items have been accessioned into the Museum's Collection, some donated, others purchased using grants and donations. These include:

- Metal detectorist finds including musket balls, button & thimble
- Locally found Treasure - a silver gilt ring and a Roman strapend - both purchased from the British Museum (see illustration)
- WW2 map of Whitchurch Heath
- 3 Whitchurch Junior School trophies

Since the closure of the library due to RAAC, bookcases have been purchased to rehouse the Local History section of the Library. Also taken into safekeeping were microfilms of local newspapers 1869-1950 and a further 12 years' worth of bound copies of the Whitchurch Herald. The Museum & Archives have a microfilm reader which allows the public to view these by appointment.

Other activities by the volunteers:

- The Heritage Centre has acted as a temporary Tourist Information access point for visitors to the town.
- Creation of free leaflets on Whitchurch men at the Battle of Trafalgar, Whitchurch & Wimbledon, Suffragettes in Whitchurch and The History of Brewing in Whitchurch
- New displays created include "Journey to the Centre of the Earth" (geology core samples from Prees – see illustrations), "19th & 20th century advertising by local tradespeople" and "Fieldname maps of Whitchurch parish". On view in the Community Display Case have been items found by a local metal detectorist
- Requests for information on local, house and family history from members of the public continue to be received from all over the world including Australia, New Zealand and USA

The website www.whitchurch-heritage.co.uk is regularly updated allowing members of the public to view the Collection electronically. In addition there are seven websites containing information on the history of Whitchurch and its surrounding villages material. In addition, they maintain a historical archive of artefacts relevant to the history of Whitchurch.

